

Scenario: Existing Situation

Introduction

As stated previously, ideas for a new north access route suggest a 90-mile road or railroad between the George Parks Highway just north of Healy to the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area. Because there has been no in-depth environmental analysis or decision regarding a north access road or railroad proposal, the visitor facilities study considers a scenario that addresses the existing situation regardless of whether or not a new north access route is developed.

This scenario considers the activities currently occurring and the existing condition of the resource, and whether or not visitor facilities could enhance the existing situation. The main focus of this scenario is on the state land along the first portion of the Stampede Road alignment, but also includes the Stampede Mine and Kantishna. Management of the national park lands would be guided by the 1986 *General Management Plan* as amended by the backcountry management plan, which is being drafted at the time of this writing.

Current uses of the state land within the study area include: camping, horseback riding, dog mushing, cross-country skiing, hunting, trapping, fishing, hiking, mountain biking and riding ATVs and snowmobiles. Other uses include material sales (i.e., sand and gravel), scientific study, a grazing permit, settlement and private land development. Public comments submitted during for this study indicated that people have a strong attachment to this area. Many commenters wanted the area left just as it is today; however, several commenters expressed a concern for resource impacts occurring in the area. For example, trails are widening in wet areas and user-created trails appear to be increasing, which can cause increased soil erosion and damage vegetation and wetlands. Several people suggested ways in which the existing situation could be enhanced, such as adding restrooms, designating camping areas (dispersed campsites to developed campgrounds), developing and maintaining a trail system, and providing interpretive opportunities.

Working Assumptions

1. Rehabilitating and maintaining existing trails could improve the existing resource conditions and recreational experiences without increasing facility development.
2. The Stampede Road would continue to be maintained to Eight Mile Lake.
3. Some level of management is needed along the Stampede Road alignment to assess and monitor resource conditions.
4. Based on the amount of use, some visitor facilities (i.e., restroom facilities, designated camp sites) could reduce impacts to the environment.
5. Both Federal and State agencies would seek partnerships with the private sector to provide services to the public, such as in the operation and maintenance of campgrounds.

List of Ideas for the Existing Situation

Location 1 – George Parks Highway

Small, low-scale facilities could highlight interpretation of the nearby archeological site along Dry Creek and become a stop along the George Parks Highway for visitors interested in the region's cultural history. Visitor facilities could include:

- Interpretive signing
- Short hiking trail
- Small parking area

Location 2 – Eight Mile Lake

Eight Mile Lake marks the end of the maintained portion of the Stampede Road and currently serves as an undeveloped parking area/trailhead and dispersed camping location. Several commenters suggested various ways to enhance the conditions in this area. The following possibilities could be explored:

- Improved parking area
- Restroom facilities
- Designated campsites or a small campground
- Designated trailhead and trail system
- Interpretive opportunities
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Lake access
- Recreation public use cabins (hut-to-hut system) on state land

Communication and coordination with nearby landowners would be necessary prior to any future improvement or development at Eight Mile Lake.

Location 3 – Savage/Teklanika Rivers

The Savage and Teklanika Rivers were identified by the public as areas for possible visitor facilities. Some of the facility ideas for the road scenario could be considered for this scenario. Ideas for visitor facilities include:

- Dispersed campsites
- Interpretive signing/wildlife viewing opportunities
- Designated trails to nearby historic cabins and mining sites
- Public use cabin(s) as part of a hut-to-hut system
- Footbridge(s) to allow safe river crossings

Location 4 – Teklanika-Sushana Divide

After crossing the Teklanika River, the road alignment rises to an elevation of 2000 feet and an expansive view of the landscape provides the visitors with a distant view of Mount McKinley, approximately 80 miles to the southwest. This vista could be incorporated into a designated trail system to afford recreational trail users the opportunity to experience the landscape. Therefore, visitor facilities could include:

- Designated trail along this divide

- Interpretive opportunities/signing

Location 5 – Sushana River

The Sushana River location would be the farthest west location for facility development on state land. This location includes the former Fairbanks City bus mentioned in Jon Krakauer's 1996 book, *Into the Wild*, that told of Chris McCandless' fateful trip to Alaska. While opinions about the bus's future vary, the bus has nonetheless become a noted landmark and destination attraction for many people. Ideas for visitor facilities at this location could include:

- Destination trail to the Sushana River and the bus (part of a greater, designated trail system)
- Dispersed campsites
- Interpretive signing
- Public use cabin(s) as part of a hut-to-hut system

Location 6 – Toklat-East Fork

Not applicable to this scenario. Visitor facility development, including trails, would be consistent with the Denali Backcountry Management Plan.

Location 7 – Toklat-Clearwater Fork

Not applicable to this scenario. Visitor facility development, including trails, would be consistent with the Denali Backcountry Management Plan.

Location 8 – Stampede Mine

The historic Stampede Mine has the potential to be a destination location for backcountry users traveling from either Eight Mile Lake or Kantishna. The Stampede airstrip allows for visitor access by small planes. Similar to the other two scenarios, visitor facilities could highlight the unique qualities and contributions of the Stampede Mine as it pertains to Alaska's mining history. The Stampede Mine airstrip would continue to be open to the public and may require improvements. The following types of visitor facilities could be considered:

- Dispersed campsites
- Interpretive loop trail through historic Stampede Mine site
- Interpretive signing
- Picnic tables and/or shelter
- Airstrip-associated facilities, such as an information kiosk and interpretive signing
- A small administrative facility (i.e., a ranger cabin) could also be considered

Location 9 – Myrtle-Willow Divide

Not applicable to the Enhancement Scenario. Visitor facility development, including trails, would be consistent with the Denali Backcountry Management Plan.

Location 10 – Kantishna/Wonder Lake

Kantishna is the terminus of the existing park road. Regardless of whether a second road or a railroad is constructed to provide additional access, some enhancements could be made to better serve the visitors. Kantishna is comprised of numerous historic mine sites and interesting natural features, such as the Quigley Cabin, Little Annie Mine and Wickersham Dome. The Quigley Cabin has been restored by the National Park Service and could be the starting point for a Kantishna interpretive/historic trail system. Lodging and flightseeing services are offered during

the summer season. The existing facilities at Wonder Lake consist of a Ranger Station that serves as a small information center, a 28-site campground for tent campers only (no private vehicle access) and a trail system. The following enhancements could be considered:

- Designated trail system (hiking and mountain biking)
- Interpretive signing (cultural and natural interpretation)
- Picnic tables and/or shelters
- Additional restroom facilities
- Information kiosks

Additional Ideas to Enhance the Existing Situation

- Form a community/interagency recreation and trails planning work group to assess needs and develop a recreation plan and multiple-use trails system.
- Conduct a “visioning” workshop with the community and user groups to identify/define a “desired future condition” for the state lands along the Stampede Road.
- Inventory and map all trails branching from the Stampede Road alignment. The National Park Service obtained recent aerial photographs of the Stampede Road alignment from Eight Mile Lake to the park’s eastern boundary that could provide an overview of the existing condition.
- Establish a designated, multiple-use trail system, addressing both motorized and non-motorized trails.
- Explore public-private partnership opportunities to provide services and/or visitor facilities to enhance the existing condition while avoiding needless duplication of services.
- Conduct a community survey to gather information on the current level and types of uses within the study area.